**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CASA SHaW releases statement on systemic and racial disparities**

**Lebanon, NJ (April 13)** – As one of the leading nonprofits in our region that engages the foster care system and racial disparity, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren Counties (CASA SHaW) released the following statement to the community:

“We at CASA SHaW continue to openly discuss, promote, and educate our community about racial injustice and the impacts it has within the foster care community.  The outcome of the Derek Chauvin trial does not undo the loss of George Floyd's life or his family's suffering. He should be here with us today. While we witnessed accountability, we understand that the pain, anger and frustration does not go away even when justice is delivered.

We also witnessed the tragic death of foster youth Ma'Khia Bryant as she was fatally shot by a law enforcement officer.  While new details emerge from this tragedy, we must not lose sight of the fact that she was removed from her family because of abuse or neglect and the traumatic impact that experience had on her life.

We must not lose sight of the profound and lifelong impacts of childhood trauma on individuals of all ages - from babies to senior citizens.  This is why we at CASA SHaW continue to learn, to speak out, to examine our practices, and to call for changes within the child welfare systems to curb systemic and cultural norms that hurt children and families. That remains our mission at CASA SHaW on behalf of ALL of the foster children we serve.”

CASA of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren Counties is part of a statewide network of community-based, non-profit programs that recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers to “Speak Up for a Child” removed from home due to abuse or neglect. CASA is the only program in New Jersey that uses trained volunteers to work one-on-one with children, ensuring that each one gets the services needed and achieves permanency in a safe, nurturing home. To find a local CASA program in your county, visit [www.casaofnj.org](http://www.casaofnj.org).

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